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ABSTRACT

Not long ago, both city and country children grew up mostly outdoors, with direct experience of plants and animals and of the ways in which the necessities of daily life were grown, made, and used. When they weren't helping with household work, children spent much of their time exploring and puttering around in the outdoor environment, relatively free from adult interference. This book suggests that such unmediated experience of the landscape of childhood has a natural role to play in child development. Drawing on the author's observations as daughter, mother, grandmother, and naturalist, and interwoven with findings from biology, linguistics, anthropology, and psychology, the book illuminates the features of the natural and social environment that our species has been biologically wired to expect. These features include a place to explore and come to know intimately, resources related to basic needs, a chance to develop skills through play, and growing involvement with a community that needs those skills and that will use myth and lore to teach the relationship between nature and culture. This ecology of childhood as it was meant to be is contrasted with the environment that has supplanted it and led to children and teenagers alienated from the natural world and their families. (Contains an index.) (Author/SV)

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